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EARRINGBACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates to an earring and, in particular, to an earring that supports selectively interchangeable ornaments.

[0002] Jewelry is typically selected by a wearer according to a particular mood, fashion choice and design. Because jewelry is often costly, however, the wearer may only have a limited number of jewelry items from which to choose. Accordingly, it is desirable to provide a single jewelry item that can be easily adapted by the wearer to be suitable for different situations.

[0003] With respect to earrings, prior art designs exist for selectively adapting an earring by attaching different ornaments to the earring. For example, U.S. Patent No. 4,803,852 discloses an earring comprising a loop member which is attachable to an ear. The loop member has a narrow throat that allows a link of a charm to be pulled therethrough to attach the charm to the earring. In this way, the wearer can selectively attach a particular charm to the earring as desired.

[0004] U.S. Patent No. 2,797,561 discloses an earring with a hook for removably attaching a pendant ornament. The earring includes a hook and a retaining plate, the lower portion of which is biased by a spring toward the hook to retain an ornament on the hook. Pendants can be interchangeably attached to this earring. The structure includes a number of generally delicate or fragile parts. This construction, however, is relatively complex.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] It is an object of the present invention to provide an earring that can securely yet interchangeably hold ornaments and is of simple construction.

[0006] Pursuant to this object, and others which will become apparent thereafter, one aspect of the present invention resides in an earring having two legs that are pivotally connected together in a scissor-like fashion. A first end of one leg has a post projecting substantially laterally therefrom for passing through a hole pierced in an ear lobe. A first end of the second leg has a hole into which a distal end of the post penetrates. In a region of the distal end of the post there is a notch which engages with an edge of the hole with a snap fit to secure the post in the hole. The second ends of each of the legs form a portion of a structural closed path that is closed when the post of the first leg is engaged in the hole of the second leg.

[0007] When the post is disengaged from the hole and the first ends of the legs are pivoted away from one another, the scissor construction causes the first ends of the legs to also pivot away from one another.

[0008] In one embodiment, the second end of one leg has a curved edge that is engaged by the second end of the other leg when the earring is closed.

[0009] In another embodiment, the second end of one leg has a pin projecting therefrom that engages in a recess in the end of the other leg when the earring is closed.

[0010] The closed path formed by the second ends of the legs when the earring is closed is made up of two unequal parts, one part being assigned to each leg. The split between the two parts, when viewed as the earring hangs vertically from the ear, with the top of the ring being 0°, is arranged between 180° and 270°.

[0011] The legs themselves can be made either of a cast material or a stamped material, i.e. gold or silver. However, it is also possible to make the legs from any other suitable material, such as plastic.

[0012] For more complete understanding of the earring of the present invention, reference is made to the following detailed description and accompanying drawings in which the presently preferred embodiments of the invention are illustrated by way of example. That the invention may be embodied in several forms

without departing from the spirit or essential characteristics thereof, it is expressly understood that the drawings are for purposes of illustration and description only, and are not intended as definitions of the limits of the invention. Throughout the following description and drawings, identical reference numbers refer to the same component throughout the several views.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0013] Figure 1 is a perspective view of a first embodiment of the earring pursuant to the present invention;

[0014] Figure 2 is a perspective view of a second embodiment of the invention;

[0015] Figure 3 is a view of the earring of Figure 1 in a closed position with an ornament attached thereto; and

[0016] Figure 4 is a cross section through another embodiment of the invention.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0017] Figure 1 illustrates a first embodiment of the inventive earring. As can be seen here, the earring has a first leg 1 and a second leg 2 that are connected to one another in a scissor-like manner at a pivot axis 3. To accomplish this the leg 1 has an opening 4 through which the leg 2 passes. A first end of the leg 2 has a lock opening 5 that is penetrated by a post 6 attached to the first end of the other leg 1. The post 6 has a locking notch 7 that engages in the edge surface defining the hole 5 to hold the earring in a closed position as shown in Figure 3. The post 6 extends substantially laterally from the first end of the leg 1 toward the hole 5 in the other leg 2. The post 6 is at a slight angle so that it does not align perfectly with the hole 5 but instead requires a small force to be applied to push the post 6 to align with the hole. This pushing action occurs due to the sloped end 8 of the post. Once the post enters

the hole 5 and passes through to the notch 7 the post 6 springs back so that the notch engages the edge of the hole 5.

**[0018]** Extending from the first ends the legs are shaped, in the illustrated embodiment curved, to pass around the earlobe and then meet at the pivot 3. Beyond the pivot 3 the legs 1, 2 cooperate to form a closed path, as can be seen in Figure 3. In the illustrated embodiments the closed path has a substantially circular shape however any desired shape for the closed path is possible.

**[0019]** The ends of the legs which form the closed path are not of equal length. The leg 2 with the locking hole 5 forms the majority of the path while the leg 1 with the post forms the remainder thereof. The mounting point between the ends of the two legs to form the path is between  $180^{\circ}$  and  $270^{\circ}$  when using the axis 3 as a reference point of  $0^{\circ}$  and traveling in a clockwise direction in Figure 3.

**[0020]** The second end of the leg 1 has a pin 9 that extends in a direction of the second end of the leg 2, which has a hole 10 therein dimensioned to accept the pin 9. When the earring is closed the pin 9 penetrates the hole 10 and creates a form locking connection of the second ends of the legs to help ensure that the ends do not separate when the earring is closed and thereby securely hold an ornament 11 on the ring without risk of falling off.

**[0021]** Figure 2 shows another embodiment of the invention which differs from the embodiment of Figure 1 in the construction of the second ends of the legs 1, 2. In this embodiment the second end of the leg 2 has a circular cross-section while the second end of the leg 1 has a curved edge 12 that conforms to the curvature of the circular end of the leg 2. When the earring is closed the curved edge 12 of the leg 1 contacts the surface of the leg 2 in a region of the end 13. In other words the ends of the two legs slightly overlap as shown in dashed lines in the drawings.

**[0022]** The pendant 11 itself can take any desired shape or form so long as it has a ring 14 which can be slipped over the end of the leg 2 when the earring is open.

**[0023]** In Figure 4, the leg 1 terminates in spaced prongs 1a, 1b, defining an opening 1c in which the distal end of the leg 2 is receivable.

**[0024]** Although the present invention has been described in relation to particular embodiments thereof, many other variations and modifications and other uses will become apparent to those skilled in the art. It is preferred, therefore, that the present invention be limited not by the specific disclosure herein, but only by the appended claims.